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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE:

Harriet Tubman: A "Servant" Leader?


SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Executive Summary

Title: Harriet Tubman: A “Servant” Leader?

Author: Commander Reginald C. Brown, Medical Service Corps, United States Navy

Thesis: Harriet Tubman’s dedication to serve first, then lead, enabled her to become one of the greatest leaders in United States history. Although not formally educated, Harriet Tubman was very intelligent.

Discussion: Harriet Tubman was an iconic figure in U.S. history who offers an example of heroism that typified the essence of service before self. She was a woman who went from a life of slavery and the trauma that was associated with such a deplorable state to being referred to as “General” by some of the most distinguished members of the Union Officer ranks. Her documented impact on the Civil War, during a time when blacks were viewed as less than capable by the North and the South, is nothing less than remarkable. From an early age, Harriet, whose birth name was Araminta, knew that freedom or dying trying to achieve it were the only options if a civilized life was to come to fruition. Harriet utilized the navigation knowledge she learned from her father to carry out multiple undetected escapee missions from the South to the free North. Her tactics for maintaining motivation were to the novice less than nurturing; her end results were always successful. This paper examines Harriet Tubman from the perspective of servant-leader. Harriet’s background; her life of slavery; her spirituality; her intellectual ability; her escape to freedom; her time with Underground Railroad; her impact during and after the Civil War. Each aspect reinforcing the conclusion that Harriet lived and died as a servant-leader.

Conclusion: Harriet Tubman epitomized the characteristics of a servant-leader. She was the type of leader who risked her personal safety with the goal of freeing slaves and abolishing slavery in the South. The great heroine never spoke of defeat, nor did she project a sense of defeat to her followers. She was “Moses,” and her followers trusted that she would lead them to the “Promise Land.” There is no question that Harriet Tubman was a servant-leader. This paper suggests that she gave her all to others but in return received less than adequate recognition from her country.

INTRODUCTION

*“Oh, go an’ carry de news,
One more soul got safe!”*

--Harriet Tubman

Harriet Tubman was an iconic figure who offers an example of heroism that led to her being referred to as “the Moses of her people.”¹ Why Moses? Harriet used songs as coded communication with fugitives who took up hidden position in wooded areas. “Go down Moses meant “stay hidden” and “Hail, Oh hail, Ye Happy Saints,” meant “all clear.”² These titles were fit descriptions of a leader committed to relieving human suffering during a time when her personal safety was unquestionably at risk. This risk was largely based on the United States being split between the slave states of the South and the free states of the North. The South was so determined to stop Harriet that slave-holders offered a reward of \$40,000 for her head. Raised as a slave, Harriet was hired out at the age of six by her owner. This arrangement meant that she would no longer reside with her family, but instead would live with a family who was unable to afford their own slaves. It was during this time that Harriet concluded that any danger associated with planning and executing an escape from slavery outweighed the prospect of the continued denial of freedom.

The suffering endured as a young girl was Harriet’s preparation for the great work that would come to pass when she grew to womanhood.³ Although she was not allowed to learn to read or write, Harriet was by no means unintelligent. Her ability as the conductor of the *Underground Railroad* in general, and her leadership qualities as a scout, spy, and nurse for the Union during the Civil War, enabled Harriet to become recognized as very capable and well respected.⁴ The latter contributions were so significant that Harriet, who born into slavery c. 1820 - c. 1822, was afforded military honors during her funeral at Auburn,

¹ Sarah Bradford, *Harriet Tubman: The Moses of her People* (New York: Corith, 1961), 3.

² H. Donald Winkler, *Stealing Secrets: How a few Daring Women Deceived Generals, Impacted Battles, and Altered the Course of the Civil War* (Naperville, IL: Cumberland House, 2010), 144.

³ Robert W. Taylor, *Harriet Tubman, the Heroine in Ebony* (Boston: George H. Ellis, 1901), 4.

⁴ Winkler, 141.

New York in 1913.⁵ This slave turned leader placed service to others ahead of service to self. She was truly a servant-leader.

What does it mean to be a “servant-leader?” According to Robert Greenleaf, who first conceptualized servant-leadership in 1977, servant leaders are those who put other people's needs, aspirations and interests above their own; they serve first, and from that service came their leadership.⁶ Although not formally educated, Harriet was very bright. Her dedication to serve first, then lead, enabled Harriet to become one of the greatest leaders in United States history. While most citizens of the United States remember Harriet Tubman as a notable conductor of the Underground Railroad and an employee of the Union during the Civil War, more recently she is being recognized for her servant-leader characteristics.

I. LIFE OF SLAVERY

“I had reasoned dis out in my mind: there was one of two things I had a right to, liberty of death. If could not have one, I would have de oder, for no man should take me alive. I should fight for my liberty as my strength lasted, and when de time came for me to go, de Lord would let dem take me.”

--Harriet Tubman

Although conflicting accounts remain concerning Harriet Tubman's history, there is one common thread—she was a leader in training who grew up to be one of the greatest leaders in U.S. History. Even without the benefit of memoirs from Harriet, and despite the lack of written records, this illiterate woman, born into slavery, led hundreds out of slavery.

Harriet, whose birth name was Araminta, was the fifth of eight children of slave parents Harriet Green and Benjamin Ross, and was born on a farm near Buck town, on the Maryland Eastern Shore.⁷ Her parents struggled to create the conditions that would allow them to remain

⁵ Winkler, 157.

⁶ James Sarros, “Servant Leadership: It Origin, Development, and Application in Organizations,” *Journal of Leadership & Organization Studies* 9, no. 2 (2002): 57, <http://search.proquest.com>.

⁷ Thomas B. Allen, *Harriet Tubman, Secret Agent* (Washington DC: National Geographic Books, 2006), 18.

together or in close proximity as a family.⁸ This desire to create a stable life resulted in avoiding having multiple owners throughout the family's time in slavery. Harriet recalled her cradle being carved from a gum tree—most likely by her father, who was a skilled woodsman, and being the center of attention when the young white women from the Big House visited the slave cabins.⁹ These are Harriet's only recorded recollections from her youngest years.

Although it is unclear as to Harriet Green's biological connection to her owner, it is clear that she was provided the dispensation that was intended to provide for the emancipation of illegitimate, mixed-race offspring.¹⁰ Harriet Green's mother was the daughter of a white man, and American.¹¹ This fact is the likely basis of the dispensation. There is even less detail about Benjamin Ross' background. From all indications Ross was a full-blooded Negro, who, based on his master's calculation, was much younger than his wife. Realizing that Ross would gain his freedom at age forty-five, the master may have miscalculated Ross' date of birth as a means of postponing emancipation.¹² To the slave owner, Araminta was a commodity whose sole purpose was for his gain. This relationship eliminated any possibility of a "normal" childhood for Araminta. She was seen by the slave owner as a means of anchoring her parents on the plantation.¹³

While still quite young, Harriet Tubman endured whipping so frequently that she prepared for the ritual by layering her clothing in advance to prevent damage to her skin.¹⁴ In an effort to give the impression that the whippings were having the desired effect, she would cry out when struck. The brutal beatings Harriet was subjected to, especially as a child, left permanent

⁸ Catherine Clinton, *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2004), 2.

⁹ Clinton, 3.

¹⁰ Clinton, 4.

¹¹ Hallie Q. Brown, *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction* (Xenia, Ohio: The Aldine Publishing Co., 1926), 66.

¹² Clinton, 4.

¹³ Clinton, 9.

¹⁴ New-England Freedmen Aid Society, "Moses," *The Freedmen's Record*, 1, no. 3 (1865): 34.

scars on her back and neck.¹⁵ In an effort to avoid being subjected to more brutality, Harriet once hid in a neighbor's pigpen and ate pig slop for five days.¹⁶ When Harriet's work location changed to the owner's mansion, it was apparent that she was ill prepared to carry out the duties of housework; no one ever provided Harriet with the training or experience. As a result of her unpreparedness, Harriet made many mistakes and was often punished.¹⁷

Harriet was very attentive to conversation about slave uprisings in the South since to her this was an affirmation that she was not the only angry slave in America. This intense preoccupation concerning freedom caused Harriet to appear proud and defiant in the eyes of her owners.¹⁸ In response to her perceived disposition and in an effort to break her "spirit," the owners hired Harriet out to another family. Nine year old Harriet was maltreated by her hired out family to the point of receiving just enough food to stay alive. After becoming too weak to work due to malnutrition, Harriet was returned to her owner. The hired family mistakenly thought Harriet's spirit was broken.¹⁹ On the contrary, this young girl had a spirit that transcended her age and not even the deplorable conditions she was forced to endure could change her outlook.

Over the years, Harriet grew stronger physically and spiritually and, in time, she was hired out to another master. That arrangement demanded work that was more fitting for a grown man, not a young girl.²⁰ However, despite being short in stature, Harriet split rails with an axe and hauled wood, never giving up even when the task seemed insurmountable for this child who was less than eleven years old.²¹

From ages eleven through fifteen, Harriet grew into someone who could accomplish

¹⁵ Winkler, 143.

¹⁶ Winkler, 143.

¹⁷ Martha Ward Plowden, *Famous First of Black Women* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing, 2002), 117.

¹⁸ Plowden, 119.

¹⁹ Plowden, 119.

²⁰ Plowden, 120.

²¹ Plowden, 120.

physical labor that was usually assigned to adults. This physical development was rewarded by Harriet's reassignment to the field where she would work until sustaining the head injury at age fifteen that would change her life forever. She remained focused on the ultimate goal—freedom for herself, which would lead to freedom for others in bondage.

At about age twenty-one, Harriet married a free African American, named John Tubman, hoping that one day he would be in a position to purchase her freedom.²² She remained a slave and continued to be in position to be hired out at a moment's notice. Her opportunity for freedom appeared to be out of reach. To distance herself further from the name given her by the slave owner, Harriet, born Araminta (Minty to the owner) took on her Mother's name. She would spend the next five years laboring and dreaming of escaping to the North.

I. SPIRITUALITY

"I wish you could hear'em sing, Missus. Der voices is so sweet, and dey can sing eberything we sing, an' dey can sing a great many hymns we can't neber catch at all."

--Harriet Tubman

Religion provided slaves a place of relief from misery, while also providing a sense of hope for the future. Religion was no different in the case of Harriet. Harriet's religious foundation was grounded in the exposure to parents who possessed a strong faith in God. The spiritual example that Harriet's parents provided during her formative years would sustain her during her most trying times. Harriet learned early on that she could talk to God in the same manner that two friends would have a conversation. When she had a need, Harriet told God and trusted that He would respond to her and take care of that need.²³

During her time of convalescence from her head injury, Harriet had a religious

²² Allen, 20.

²³ Bradford, 23.

experience. It was this experience that caused Harriet to have dreams and divine promptings related to death and to freedom.²⁴ Harriet had a connection with and a confidence in God that was intimate in nature. She spoke of having daily conversations with God during which He responded.²⁵ This faith that Harriet possessed never wavered, even in times of extreme danger. It was Harriet's position that God's plan was being carried out and she was the tool that God chose to lead her people out of slavery.²⁶

Harriet was so dedicated to what she viewed as God's plan that she was not even deterred when approaching abolitionists' business offices for funding in support of mission trips. On one occasion she received a divine signal concerning approaching a specific business office in pursuit of funding. Although she was not initially received positively, Harriet refused to accept rejection as a solution and eventually received the amount of sixty dollars.²⁷ She was convinced that God did not make a mistake in directing her to the specific business officer—she just needed to apply additional pressure to assist God in getting the desired result.

Spirituality was also part of Harriet's master plan for freeing the slaves. Sermons and spirituals shaped the language of freedom into biblical parables.²⁸ Moses, as Harriet was called, used the songs of escape from Egypt as part of her system of signals in conducting her rescues. Harriet prayed for her enemies even though it was common knowledge that those same enemies wanted to kill her.

II. INTELLECTUAL ABILITY

"I would say that most leaders are made. A fellow that comes from a long line of ancestors with determination and courage has no doubt inherited some leadership qualities. I have seen many times in combat where somebody who is

²⁴ Garry Wills, *Certain Trumpets: The Call of Leaders* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 43.

²⁵ Wilbur Henry Siebert and Albert Bushnell Hart, *The Underground Railroad From Slavery to Freedom* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1898), 188.

²⁶ Siebert and Hart, 188.

²⁷ Wills, 43.

²⁸ Wills, 44.

small and meek was given the opportunity and had leadership you never before realized he had, and he becomes a Medal of Honor winner. There are some qualities inherited that make you a good leader; but many who have not these qualities develop them, or just seem to come up with them when the opportunity knocks.”

--GEN Dwight Eisenhower

The fact that Harriet spent the first twenty-five years of her life as a slave in Maryland severely limited her opportunities to receive formal education.²⁹ However, her lack of education did not prevent those who had formal education from listening to what she had to say. This heroine had absolutely no knowledge of geography, and still she possessed the intellect that would allow her to breach Southern strongholds and personally lead hundreds of fugitive slaves to freedom in the North.³⁰ Forced to compensate for her lack of formal schooling, Harriet unquestionably excelled in the difficult task she chose—leading those who were seeking freedom.

Ironically, in 1820, around the time that Harriet is said to have been born, the first schools for Negroes were opened in Ohio through the efforts of colored men in Cincinnati.³¹ This effort would have benefited Harriet if she had been free. However, Harriet was living in slavery in the South and had a precise focus: freedom for herself and freedom for others.

Harriet’s ability to teach others was not totally overlooked. *The Freedmen’s Record*, a monthly publication of the Boston-based New-England Freedmen’s Aid Society, reported in March 1865 that Harriet Tubman was one of the teachers commissioned by the Aid Society.³² Although Harriet lacked formal education she used her intellectual ability to function in many environments. The Aid Society recognized this as the case.

²⁹ Ascott R. Hope, *Heroes in Homespun: Scenes and Stories From the American Emancipation Movement* (London: Wilsons & Milne, 1894), 157.

³⁰ W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices From Within the Veil* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), 175.

³¹ Lelia Pendleton, *A Narrative of the Negro* (Washington, D.C.: Press of R. L. Pendleton, 1912), 124.

³² New-England Freedmen Aid Society, 34.

III. FREEDOM

*Good bye, I'm going to leave you,
Good bye, I'll meet you in kingdom*

--Harriet Tubman

As a teenager, Harriet Tubman resisted her enslavement. In one instance after being ordered to participate in the punishment of a fellow slave, she refused to cooperate and as a result was smashed in the head with a two-pound weight.³³ What Harriet was protesting was the practice whereby an overseer would supervise while lashes were inflicted on a slave by another slave.³⁴ Harriet's resistant behavior was not only punishable; this act was legally punishable by death. As a result of the blow to the head, Harriet would experience narcoleptic seizures for the rest of her life. In 1849 Harriet's master died. Harriet felt some level of guilt after seeking his death because she prayed, "Lord, if you're never going to change that man's heart, kill him and take him out of the way so he won't do more mischief."³⁵ Almost thirty years old and childless, Harriet understood that it was common practice for slaves to be sold off at the time of a master's death. Harriet was made aware that she and her fellow slaves would be sold to distant buyers.³⁶ This incident propelled Harriet, by 1844 married to the free slave John Tubman, to escape the life of slavery. It is important to pause here and point out that in 1844 Harriet was unaware that she was legally a free woman through the will provision of her mother.³⁷ However, since her mother had been sold in spite of the will's provision, it was unlikely the judicial system would acknowledge the stipulation.³⁸ John refused to participate in any plans for escape so Harriet left him behind. The end result of their long separation was that John remarried. This is not

³³ Henry Louis Gates, *Life Upon These Shores: Looking at African American History 1513-2008* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2011), 90.

³⁴ Moncure D. Conway, *Testimonies Concerning Slavery*, 2nd ed. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1889), 14.

³⁵ Webb B. Garrison, *Amazing Women of the Civil War* (Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 1999), 29.

³⁶ Bert James Loewenberg and Ruth Bogin, *Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), 218.

³⁷ Garrison, 31.

³⁸ Garrison, 31.

surprising seeing that Harriet's husband put up no apparent or documented resistance related to her desire to escape. John was born free and Harriet was not.³⁹ It was at this time that Harriet was able to utilize two lessons her father taught her. He taught her how to move through the woods without being noticed and he taught her how to locate the North Star—a way to freedom.

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Harriet's flight to freedom began in Maryland and ended at Cape May, New Jersey where she found work as a cook, domestic, and laundress. She then moved to the black community in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada. Determined to have her family experience freedom and with little regard for her safety, Harriet returned to Maryland to begin rescuing family members. After she rescued her family, she conducted thirteen additional missions back to Maryland.⁴¹ During one of the missions back to Maryland, Harriet attempted to retrieve her husband. However, the man who lacked the faith to join Harriet had remarried.⁴² Harriet's initial reaction was that of anger and grief. She then came to herself and made the decision to dedicate her life to serving the good of others. This pivotal point in Harriet's life led to her passion toward the work of Moses—the deliverer of her people.

Not unlike many other slaves during her time, Harriet had clear reasons for escaping or attempting to escape. First was the love of freedom. As a slave, she saw the nature and injustice of their position as contrary to the freedom that was natural to all men. A second reason was the cruel treatment received from their masters or their representatives. And a third reason was the fear of being sold, a method used by owners as a means of reducing rebellious behavior among the slave population.⁴³ Slave owners understood that as long as slave families remained together,

³⁹ Yona Zeldis McDonough, *Who was Harriet Tubman?* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 2002), 31.

⁴⁰ McDonough, 28.

⁴¹ Gates, 91.

⁴² New-England Freedmen Aid Society, 35.

⁴³ Marion Gleason McDougall, *Fugitive Slaves 1619-1895* (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1891), 54.

their love for one another provided the strongest bond to prevent escape. Separating families without the chance of reunion created an increased desire to escape.⁴⁴

The danger and risk experienced by Harriet increased each time she led fugitive slaves to freedom in the United States or to Canada. Irrespective of this increased danger, Harriet exhibited characteristics of a great leader; courage, foresight, self-control, common sense, imagination.⁴⁵ Harriet's ability to motivate those who questioned their ability to succeed in the journey to freedom was uncanny. Harriet used the threat of lethal force as an option on anyone who gave out along the way. Her reasoning was that if the person was weak enough to give up on the way, they would be weak enough to betray other fugitives and those who had provided assistance.⁴⁶ This no nonsense approach reinforced Harriet's aim of caring for others as they sought freedom in Canada. Once Harriet led fugitive slaves to Canada, she addressed their welfare, collected clothing, organized them into societies, and was always focused on plans for their benefit.⁴⁷ John Brown, a well known abolitionist, called "General" Tubman one of the best and bravest persons on the North American continent.⁴⁸

IV. UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

"Way down in Egypt-land. Tell ol' Pharaoh to let My people go."

--Harriet Tubman

The Underground Railroad was the coordinated effort by which slaves were led to the North by way of secret routes from the South. Those who risked their own lives to journey back

⁴⁴ McDougall, 55.

⁴⁵ New-England Freedmen Aid Society, 35.

⁴⁶ New-England Freedmen Aid Society, 36.

⁴⁷ New-England Freeman Aid Society, 37.

⁴⁸ Wilbur H. Siebert, "The Underground Railroad in Ohio," *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Publications*, no.4 (1941): 58.

and forth from the South, leading slaves out of bondage, were called “conductors.”⁴⁹ Harriet was one of the most famous conductors on the Underground Railroad and by 1851 she had become a legend associated with this transportation to freedom for those slaves seeking an escape from the hands of slave owners. Harriet maintained the same routine for six years, until 1857, each year making two trips to the South, once in the spring and again in the fall.⁵⁰ In preparation for the missions to rescue fugitive slaves, Harriet lived in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada in the winter and Cape May, New Jersey in the summer. The significance of St. Catharines was that many fugitive slaves settled at that location. Residing in Cape May during the summer allowed Harriet to obtain work to earn the money used to fund the rescue missions.

During her rescue mission in the spring of 1857, Harriet was able to rescue her aged parents.⁵¹ She was not rescuing her parents from slavery, because her father was emancipated in 1840, and fifteen years later, he purchased his wife for the sum of twenty dollars.⁵² The friction between proslavery and antislavery advocates that occurred after the *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857) decision necessitated that Harriet’s parents move out of the South.⁵³ So in reality Harriet rescued her parents from the hostile environment that existed for free blacks in the slave South.⁵⁴ By the fall of 1858, Harriet was credited with leading more than 300 slaves to freedom in the North.⁵⁵ It was clear time after time that Harriet placed the liberty of others ahead of her own. She saw the oppression of her race and was determined to do her part in making the enslaved

⁴⁹ Bob Navarro, *The Country in Conflict: Executives and Events During the American Civil War* (London: Xlibris Corporation, 2008), 436.

⁵⁰ Jim Haskins and others, *Black Stars of Civil War Times* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 35.

⁵¹ Haskins and others, 35.

⁵² Wilma King, “Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom/Harriet Tubman: The Life and Stories/Bound for Promise,” *The Journal of Southern History* 71, no.3 (August 2005): 693, <http://search.proquest.com/>.

⁵³ The U.S. Supreme Court’s 1857 decision in *Dred Scott v. Sanford* barred Congress from prohibiting slavery in the western territories. After the Civil War, the Dred Scott decision was reversed through passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1866 followed by the Fourteenth Amendment’s Citizenship Clause (Margaret Stock, “Is Birthright Citizenship Good for America?” *Cato Journal* 32, no.1 (Winter 2012): 141, <http://search.proquest.com/>).

⁵⁴ King, 693.

⁵⁵ Haskins and others, 37.

free. Harriet's personality and power were of such a magnitude that she was etched in the minds of the anti-slavery leaders of her generation.⁵⁶ This leader, after losing confidence in the government's ability to protect her people, especially after the Fugitive Slave Law was passed, accompanied slaves to their final destination in Canada. The safety and welfare of those she was leading was always the main priority.⁵⁷ On all her rescue missions Harriet carried a loaded pistol to help maintain the attention of timid slaves and as a means of providing protection from slave catchers.⁵⁸

Due to the fact that the North and South were at war in early 1861, Harriet, who was about thirty-eight years old, made her last trip as a conductor of the Underground Railroad in December 1860.⁵⁹ At its end, the network to freedom was responsible for assisting almost 100,000 black slaves achieve freedom through escape routes from the South to the North.⁶⁰ Although there were many conductors and associates who were important to success of the Underground Railroad, it is Harriet's name that is most familiar and most significant. It was during her time with the Underground Railroad that Harriet acquired the spy skills that she would employ during the Civil War. These included donning disguises that allowed her to present herself as an old woman who was overlooked by the same proslavery communities that wanted desperately to see her captured.

V. CIVIL WAR INVOLVEMENT

"Since the rebellion she has devoted herself to the great work of delivering bondsmen, with an energy and sagacity that cannot be exceeded."

--The Wisconsin State Journal on Harriet Tubman

⁵⁶ Siebert and Hart, 185.

⁵⁷ Siebert and Hart, 188.

⁵⁸ Winkler, 145.

⁵⁹ Haskins and others, 37.

⁶⁰ Navarro, 437.

The Civil War was Harriet's opportunity to elevate her personal quest against slavery to a quest to support preservation of the Union. She wanted to make freedom a reality for all the men, women, and children and reflected on "hearing their groans and sighs, and seeing their tears."⁶¹ She would do anything in her power to bring freedom to those enslaved in the South. Harriet was known for doing what needed to be done no matter the level of risk to her own life. However, what she really wanted was to go to war.⁶² Evidence was starting to indicate that slavery had reached the point where war was the only option to bring about its abolition. Harriet wanted to remain part of the solution and contribute to the cause primarily through gathering intelligence. Harriet Tubman's intelligence activities during the Civil War are well documented. The Central Intelligence Agency documented Harriet's contributions, along with other black spies, in the publication *Black Dispatches*.⁶³ Harriet was one of the Civil War's most daring and effective spies, largely due to her contributions being closely connected to important military operations.⁶⁴ In May 1862, for example, before the first Northern black regiments were authorized, she accompanied a group of missionary-teachers to South Carolina to render aid to escaped slaves who were able to make their way to Union lines.⁶⁵ Harriet's performance caught the attention of General Rufus Saxton, who was military governor of the Department of the South and the person primarily responsible for enlisting ex-slaves into the Federal Army.⁶⁶ He described Harriet's actions as a display of remarkable courage, zeal, and fidelity.⁶⁷

In January 1863, Harriet was instrumental in raising a regiment of African American

⁶¹ Allen, 13.

⁶² Allen, 135.

⁶³ Winkler, 143.

⁶⁴ Winkler, 143.

⁶⁵ Haskins and others, 37.

⁶⁶ Lorien Foote, "Firebrand of Liberty: The Story of Two Black Regiments That Changed the Course of the Civil War," *The Journal of Southern History*, 76, no.1(February 2010): 164.

⁶⁷ Siebert and Hart, 189.

infantry that became the 2nd South Carolina Colored Infantry.⁶⁸ In support of the infantry unit, Harriet's spy team of nine provided reconnaissance reports to the infantry unit that outlined enemy positions, movements, and fortifications. The team's input was so substantial that the Secretary of War in Washington, DC, authorized the 2nd South Carolina Colored Infantry to carry out an attack on Jacksonville, Florida.⁶⁹

In the spring of 1863, Union officials were in need of information related to the strength, location of encampments, and designs of fortifications of the opposing Confederate forces in South Carolina.⁷⁰ Harriet went about obtaining this information through a series of missions behind enemy lines. Realizing that these missions could not be carried out alone, Harriet had the foresight to select former slaves who were familiar with the areas to be visited and established a spy organization.⁷¹ The intelligence reports provided by Harriet and her team not only revealed enemy logistics areas, they also provided the Union leadership with points of weakness in Confederate troop deployments.

General David Hunter, commander of all Union forces under the Department of the South also recognized Harriet's leadership ability.⁷² He personally requested Harriet to guide a team consisting of an officer and 151 men past Confederate lines. This mission involved traveling up the Combahee River located in the southern region of South Carolina. The mission was a success; the Union forces were able to destroy millions of dollars of supplies, retrieve more than 800 slaves, and capture thousands of dollars in enemy property.⁷³ Harriet described the scene of the slaves after realizing freedom was at hand:

⁶⁸ Winkler, 150.

⁶⁹ Winkler, 150.

⁷⁰ Kenneth A. Daigler, "The Civil War: Black American Contributions to Union Intelligence," *Studies in Intelligence*, 42, no.5 (Winter 1998-1999): 78.

⁷¹ Daigler, 78.

⁷² Foote, 164.

⁷³ Daigler, 79.

“Some was getting their breakfasts, just taking pots of rice off the fire, and they’d [carry] the pots, with rice a smokin’, young ones hanging on behind...Some had blankets on their heads with their things done up in them, and them that hadn’t a pot of rice would have a child in their arms, sometimes one or two holding on to their mother’s dress; some carrying two children, one astride of the mother’s neck and another in her arms. Some had bags on their backs with pigs in them; some had chickens squawking, and pigs squealing. They all come runnin’ to the gunboats through the rice fields. They [reminded] me of the children of Israel coming out of Egypt.”⁷⁴

In the midst of the chaos, and due to the fear of being left behind, the slaves took hold of the rowboats and would not let go. The ship’s captain called on Harriet to provide her leadership. She spoke the words “Come from the East/Come from the Wes.../Come along; come along;/Don’t be alarmed./For Uncle Sam is rich enough/To give you all a farm.”⁷⁵ Harriet’s words were sufficient to diffuse the situation.

In 1863, the *Emancipation Proclamation*, which freed slaves in Confederate-held areas, was signed by President Lincoln.⁷⁶ Through this proclamation, Lincoln made it clear that black freedom was an objective of the Civil War.⁷⁷ The signing of the *Emancipation Proclamation* allowed black men who wanted to fight for the Union to join the Northern Army. This led to the formation of all black regiments. In December 1865, slavery in the United States was abolished. Harriet Tubman had a major part in bringing about that result.

Harriet’s contributions to the Union’s effort were so significant that, in the last year of the war, she was provided with documents that allowed her unrestricted travel through the lines of the Union Army whenever and wherever she wished.⁷⁸ In recognition of her profound impact, Queen Victoria bestowed a silver medal on Harriet, along with a letter of recognition and

⁷⁴ Winkler, 154.

⁷⁵ Winkler, 154.

⁷⁶ Richard Cardine, “Lincoln and Emancipation: Black Enfranchisement in 1863 Louisiana.” *Magazine of History* 21, no.1 (January 2007): 45. <http://search.proquest.com/>.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 45.

⁷⁸ Charles Burleigh Murray, *Life Notes of Charles B. Murray* (Cincinnati: n.p., 1915), 34.

invitation to visit England. The Smithsonian Institution, in 1982, honored Harriet as “the only American woman ever to plan and lead a military raid.”⁷⁹ For someone lacking military training this was a great leadership accomplishment. A woman from humble beginnings was recognized for placing the needs of the disenchanting downtrodden ahead of her own.

VI. POST CIVIL WAR

“The most that you have done had been witnessed by a few trembling, scared, and foot-sore women, whom you have led out of the house of bondage, and whose heartfelt ‘God Bless You’ has been your only reward.”

--Frederick Douglass

One year after the conclusion of the Civil War, Harriet continued participating in intelligence activities, while also attending to the newly liberated slaves.⁸⁰ Through her communication skills, Harriet was more successful in intelligence than anybody else. Once her intelligence duties concluded, Harriet labored as a nurse for the U.S. Sanitary Commission in Washington, DC, and reported on abuses in hospitals.⁸¹ Serving as a nurse allowed Harriet the opportunity to look after the well being of others at one of the most vulnerable times in their life.

After faithfully serving her country, Harriet relocated to Auburn, New York, and with the assistance of two trusted colleagues, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, championed the cause for women’s rights.⁸² All did not go well for Harriet, as she was returning to a place that was racially segregated. Harriet had provided a great service to her country only to return to a city divided across racial lines. In 1869, Harriet was married to a black Civil War veteran by the name of Nelson Davis, who was twenty-two years her junior in age. The couple adopted a baby girl named Gertie. Details on Gertie’s background remain unknown. What has been

⁷⁹ Garrison, 34.

⁸⁰ Winkler, 156.

⁸¹ Winkler, 156.

⁸² Kahlil Chism, “Harriet Tubman: Spy, Veteran, and Widow,” *Magazine of History* 19, no.2 (March 2005): 47, <http://search.proquest.com>.

gathered from an 1888 family photograph is that Gertie was very light-skinned, with grayish-looking eyes.⁸³ These physical characteristics were common among slaves that bore children fathered by slave owners. There is no research available that validates Gertie's lineage, only speculation.

VII. LEADERSHIP

"Leadership must be based on goodwill. Goodwill does not mean posturing and, least of all, pandering to the mob. It means obvious and wholehearted commitment to helping followers. We are tired of leaders we fear, tired of leaders we love, and most tired of leaders who let us take liberties with them. What we need for leaders are men of the heart who are so helpful that they, in effect, do away with the need of their jobs. But leaders like that are never out of a job, never out of followers. Strange as it sounds, great leaders gain authority by giving it away."

--Admiral James B. Stockdale

When asked to risk their freedom, and in some cases, their lives, followers need leaders who exhibit great devotion and project self-sacrifice.⁸⁴ Harriet was this type of leader. Her actions spoke volumes over her words. Harriet was not physically impressive. She was just over five feet tall, in her late thirties at the time of her significant leadership contributions, wearing clothes that were worn, yet neat, and when she smiled her two missing top front teeth were evident.⁸⁵ From these external features, one may ponder the question: Who would respect and follow such a woman? History reflects that hundreds of slaves recognized Harriet's leadership capability and chose to follow her to freedom. This woman of small stature had a reputation and influence that garnered respect from slaves and influential northerners alike.⁸⁶ John Brown, a well known revolutionary abolitionist remarked that Harriet "was a better officer than most whom he had seen, and could command an army as successful as she had led her small parties of

⁸³ Beverly Lowry, *Harriet Tubman: Imagining a Life* (New York: Random House, 2007), 369

⁸⁴ Wills, 40.

⁸⁵ John C. Maxwell, *The Right to Lead: Learning Leadership Through Character and Courage* (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 64.

⁸⁶ Maxwell, 65.

fugitives.”⁸⁷

Although Harriet could have appeared as being less than a leader due to her lack of formal education and living in a majority culture that viewed her as property, she worked through these obstacles and became a great leader. Her approach was not to make excuses; her approach was to take charge and lead from the front. Her ability to gather information wisely, prepare thoroughly, envision what could be gained, understand what was at stake, and move forward with confidence, showed that Harriet was a wise leader.⁸⁸ A wise leader that took those risks designed to bring about a positive outcome for those who were following.

VIII. LATER YEARS

*“I have learned that success is not to be measured so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed. How often I have wanted to say to white students that they lift themselves up in proportion as they help to lift others. No man whose vision is bounded by color can come into contact with what is highest and best in this world.”*⁸⁹

--Booker T Washington

Harriet spent her later years working on behalf of her race. At Auburn, New York, she founded a home that accommodated the homeless, orphaned, and ailing while also providing ministry to those within this home.⁹⁰ The official opening of the Harriet Tubman Home for Aged and Infirm Negroes occurred in 1908.⁹¹ Despite her advanced age, she stood the great test, the supreme test, the Christ test—which is service.⁹² Frederick Douglass wrote that, “excepting John Brown, I know of no one who has willingly encountered more peril and hardships to serve our enslaved people.”⁹³

⁸⁷ Maxwell, 65.

⁸⁸ Maxwell, 69.

⁸⁹ Murray, 35

⁹⁰ Pendleton, 141.

⁹¹ King, 694.

⁹² Taylor, 16.

⁹³ Garrison, 34.

The year 1890 was eventful for Harriet. Congress agreed, more than thirty years after the end of the Civil War, to pay her a pension of \$20 a month. However, this Congressional action was not tied to Harriet's military service. Rather, it was tied to the death of her husband, a veteran, who died after a struggle with tuberculosis. Although there were well known individuals who submitted letters of support for a pension on behalf of Harriet, those appeals were unsuccessful. The Honorable Charles P. Wood of Auburn, New York, wrote to the government officials, beginning with a proclamation but concluding with a lack of endorsement:

“That Harriet is entitled to several thousands of dollars pay, there can be no doubt—the only difficulty seems to be in the facts that she held no commission, and has not in the regular way and at the proper times and places, made proof and application of her just compensation.”⁹⁴

Also in 1890, Harriet retired to Auburn, New York, and spent the remainder of her life carrying out good deeds in the Harriet Tubman Home that she built in 1908.⁹⁵ She even used most of the \$20 a month pension to fund this Home.⁹⁶ In 1896, Harriet was the keynote speaker at the first ever meeting of the National Federation of Afro-American Women.⁹⁷ The following year, she was honored through a series of receptions in Boston; Harriet sold a cow to afford the train ticket. A woman of such prominence was treated as though her contributions were insignificant. By 1911, Harriet's physical conduction was such and her financial state was so destitute that she had to be admitted to the Harriet Tubman Home for the Aged.⁹⁸ She died at age ninety-two on March 10, 1913, and was buried with full military honors at Fort Hill Cemetery in

⁹⁴ Chism, 48.

⁹⁵ Jack Freeze, *They Shall be Remembered: A Great American Saga from the War of 1812 to World War I* (New York: iUniverse, 2009), 385.

⁹⁶ Plowden, 123.

⁹⁷ Public Broadcasting Service, “People & Ideas: Harriet Tubman, October 11, 2010, <http://www.pbs.org/godinamerica/people/harriet-tubman.html>.

⁹⁸ Winkler, 157.

Auburn, New York.⁹⁹ The cause of death was pneumonia.¹⁰⁰ Just before her death, Harriet reminded those around her: “I go to prepare a place for you.”¹⁰¹ This servant leader went to her resting place desiring first to serve. On June 12, 1914, a bronze memorial tablet of Harriet Tubman was unveiled in Auburn, New York. This act was a testimony to a leader who possessed extraordinary foresight and judgment.¹⁰² The impact that she had as a leader will be realized for generations to come. Because this five foot tall giant of a woman had the foresight to realize that combating slavery was not just for the moment. It would change a way of life forever.

CONCLUSION

“I looked at my hands, to see if I was the same person now I was free. There was such a glory over everything, the sun came like gold through the trees, and over the field, and I felt like I was in heaven.”

--Harriet Tubman

Out of the bonds of slavery came a servant-leader who forever changed the face of leadership. A strong character, Harriet Tubman was not satisfied with obtaining freedom from slavery only for herself. She put herself in harm’s way to give others the opportunity of experiencing freedom. Her style of servant leadership was always evident in each rescue mission. Although fear was ever present, Harriet appeared to be devoid of personal fear and fully engaged in protecting the slaves she led. The directions Harriet gave were pointed and clear; her “in charge” persona was unmistakable. The followers called her Moses, because they had a commitment to a leader who would support them from the slavery of the South to the freedom of the North.

Her spiritual and intimate relationship with God allowed Harriet to be inspired by a

⁹⁹ Navarro, 448.

¹⁰⁰ Harold Holzer, *State of the Union: New York and the Civil War* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 44.

¹⁰¹ Public Broadcasting Service

¹⁰² Murray, 35.

power higher than herself. Her belief was that God would provide the direction and she would provide the structure and leadership. Harriet was a servant first and then a leader. Her unwavering commitment to her followers, even when her own life was at stake, clearly depicted a leader described by Robert Greenleaf in 1977 as one who put other people's needs, aspirations and interests above their own; they serve first, as opposed to lead. Naval Service leaders at all levels in the organization should consider this leadership approach. Great leaders in general and servant-leaders specifically, leave a legacy that is long lasting. Harriet Tubman proved servant leadership could be successful under slavery and combat conditions in the 1800s. Today's leaders may find it helpful in the 21st century. Serve first, and then lead.

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